

AURORA

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Welcome to the Class Struggle

"I want to finish my education. My dream is to go to Europe and have a beautiful life."

[19 year old Somali woman stuck in Libya, trying to find means to get on a boat to Europe.]

Throughout the world millions of workers face an uncertain future. Capitalist growth is declining and the global economic crisis is deepening. The official figure of world unemployment is nonsense. The International Labour Organisation says that 200 million will be unemployed by 2017. In reality only 1.3 billion of the world's 5 billion adults have a job with regular pay and over half the world's population somehow survive on less than \$2 per day. Unsurprisingly, even in the economic chill following the financial crash, over 3 million people a year still migrate from one part of the world to another – mainly from the poorer south to the richer north – in search of a job with a regular wage that will bring them a better life.

Nothing new here. Throughout its relatively short history capitalism has created a working class from ruined peasantry and uprooted workers whose poverty has obliged them to migrate within and beyond borders. The need to travel between countries to find a job emphasises the essence of the working class, that workers have no country. Together we have created all the real wealth of this system of production. But this wealth takes the form of capital and is used to squeeze more unpaid

labour (profit) out of us without any concern for human needs. In times of economic crisis, capitalists have always ruthlessly expelled workers from the labour force with no care about how they are supposed to live.

This is a Capitalist Crisis Not a Migrant Crisis

Today capitalism faces a global economic crisis without precedent. This crisis began long before 2007 but the bursting of the speculative bubble has created a new economic paralysis in the so-called advanced states. Despite profits running into record trillions of dollars for high-profile companies like Apple, these are far out-weighted by capitalism's ever-increasing debt mountain (based on fictitious capital created by central banks' 'quantitative easing' and multiplied by financial speculation) and a formidably low profit rate – which in turn is cause and consequence of the recent collapse in commodity prices. The capitalists are doing their utmost to boost the rate of profit in the 'real economy', where new wealth is created, by making workers do more work for less pay and generally reduce the cost of upkeep of the wage slaves. Spending on social services, education, health and welfare for the needy, and much more is being constantly slashed – all under the banner of 'austerity'. Very few workers in Europe can now dream of a "beautiful life".

For years the European states, including the UK, more or less maintained a two-faced policy. Anti-racist legislation and opening up of borders sat easily with the gutter press and far-right politicians thundering against 'asylum-seekers' taking jobs, lay-about Roma jumping housing queues and living off benefits, whilst bosses quietly welcomed illegal migrants who can be exploited so much more viciously without being able to fight back. Today, thanks to austerity, there is a bigger pool of local unemployed and a generally lower-cost workforce. At this point in the economic crisis the bosses

have less need for all but the most skilled of migrant labour.

Escaping Imperialist War

Unfortunately for the political class who have the job of guarding the vested interests of capital, the flow of migrants cannot be turned on and off like a tap. Global economic crisis means increased imperialist rivalry which has created hell in many areas of the planet. The destruction of existing state structures by Western imperialism in Afghanistan and Iraq has opened up a Pandora's Box which is now dovetailing into the debris of the Arab Spring of 2011. This was itself a consequence of the collapse of the financial system in 2008 which has had repercussions around the world.

The UNHCR estimates that in the last 5 years around 60 million people throughout the world have been displaced due to war. This is the biggest number since the Second World War ended. Over half the migrants to Europe come from Syria and most of the rest from Afghanistan, Eritrea, Iraq, Somalia and Sudan. Syria, now in its fifth year of 'civil war' has become the ominous emblem of what imperialist rivalry has in store for the rest of the world. More than five major powers are vying for their own imperialist interests – the US (supported by the UK, Germany and France), Russia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, with no concern for the terrible destruction of human lives or cities. Around 12 million people, more than half the population, is "displaced". While 4 million Syrians are refugees, most are in Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan. [http://www.worldvision.org/news-stories-videos/syria-war-refugee-crisis#sthash]

Racism and Nationalism On the Rise

Of course if you read the Daily Mail or Daily Express etc these are not

human beings fleeing for their lives. They are just a "horde" of outsiders aiming to steal what we have: our jobs, benefits and houses. On the European mainland the EU's open border policy is breaking down (the Schengen zone) under the weight of sinister racist responses to "choke off the flow" of refugees by national politicians. In Germany support for the populist Alternative für Deutschland party is growing as are attacks on refugee shelters. Out and out racism is more and more part of the political mainstream. Capitalism's most desperate victims are being made the scapegoat for the economic crisis.

Politicians have always turned to nationalism and racism to prevent what capitalists fear most, that workers should recognise their common enemy in capitalism and unite against their exploiters. The truth is that the way of life of "hard working families" is threatened, not by impoverished newcomers to the labour force, but by the constant attacks from the system that supposedly represents them.

Brexit: No Concern of the Working Class

When it comes to politicians peddling racism and nationalism Britain is no exception. All the main parties agree that immigration must be curbed. Little Englander UK Independence Party (UKIP) go one step further and blame the EU for admitting migrants who are blamed for everything from the housing shortage to high unemployment. Originally the Conservative leadership thought up the idea of a referendum over breaking from the EU as a way to halt the rise of UKIP and keep their own right wingers quiet. But all this is just ruling class infighting. Like the Scottish independence pantomime, media hype around voting 'yes' or 'no' to Brexit will distract workers from the further economic misery Osborne has in store.

The EU may be in danger of imploding but this is of no concern to the

working class. It just shows how serious capitalism's crisis has become and how much it is beyond the control of the representatives of the capitalist class.

Stand Together Against Nationalism

As world capitalism's economic order implodes and its political order crumbles, the prospect for humanity is bleak. We are at a critical historical juncture. Increased destitution, unemployment and wars stoked by imperialism in the pursuit of profit are all the current system has on offer. The only way out is for the world's workers, the people who produce the real wealth, to join together to get rid of capitalism itself. This may sound like an impossible dream. But daily life itself is dispelling the illusion that there is a beautiful life ahead under the present system where 62 people reportedly 'own' as much wealth as half the world's population. It's time now for workers everywhere to stand together against capitalism. It's time for an international political organisation to revive the vision of communism that once shook capital to the core. Not Stalinist work camps and endless drudgery for party dictatorships. Our struggle is for a new world ... without war, without unemployment, without profit which causes wars; a world without checkpoints and borders which knows no distinction between race, creed or colour; a world without social classes where human beings decide collectively how and what to produce to directly fulfil human needs.

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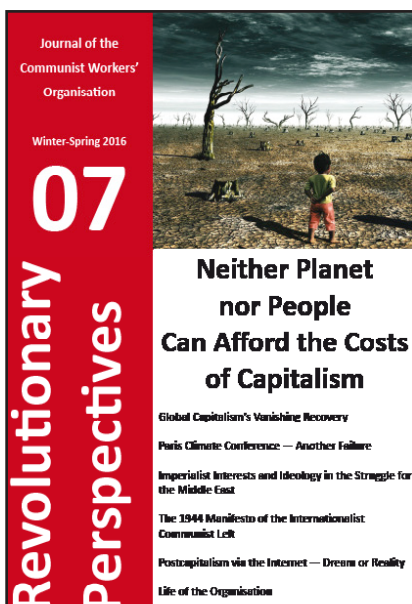
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Junior Hospital Doctors Take up the Class Struggle

Junior hospital doctors are refusing to back off in their fight against the government’s scheme to impose a new work contract. The BMA has announced strikes for March 9, April 6 and April 26. Each will last for 48 hours — double the length of previous action. As always, the doctors will continue to carry out emergency care on those days. Jeremy Hunt, the Health Secretary, is pretending that the issue at stake is doctors sabotaging plans for a seven day health service. In a blatant propaganda war against the doctors, he’s tried to imply that they are refusing to work extra hours and are therefore responsible for the dubious figure of 6,000 deaths per year due to a lack of hospital weekend staff.

This is just an outright lie. The figure has been plucked from the air. The doctors are not refusing to work weekends. They are not blocking plans for better hospital care. They are opposing Hunt’s arbitrary attempt to make them work longer hours for less pay. Essentially the government’s plan is to redefine what constitutes normal working time. Under their current contracts junior doctors are paid a basic salary of around £22,600. At the moment they are paid extra for working after 7 p.m. on weekdays and at weekends. The new contract would extend ‘normal



time’ to 10 p.m. on weekdays and 7 p.m. on Saturdays and the doctors could be obliged to work more nights and weekends without being able to object. In terms of take home pay it means a wage cut of around 30% to 40%. On top of that, they will only be entitled to one 20 minute break every six hours.

These are familiar bosses’ tricks which workers in other jobs will easily recognise. No wonder the doctors are turning to strike action: withdrawal of labour is the ultimate weapon for wage workers everywhere. Welcome to the class struggle!

As one retired doctor recently wrote, *“The mass of junior doctors has learned and organised, and for the first time in history they are identifying themselves as workers ...”* [Mike Downham, Glasgow, in a letter published in the London Review of Books, vol.38, no.4, Feb 2016]

What History Tells Us

In truth this is not the first time junior doctors have been moved to strike. In 1975, in the early stage of the economic crisis that has been dogging capitalism ever since, junior hospital doctors struck for the first time. During the winter of 1974/75 the working class was seething. With inflation around 25%, more and more workers were striking just to try and keep up the real value of their wages. Airline workers, lorry drivers, steelworkers, engineering workers, fire crews, teachers, bus drivers, were just some of the groups who took to the streets over their wage claims. In the NHS the taboo on strikes had already been broken when ancillary workers struck against a pay freeze in 1972 and nurses and radiographers followed suit in 1974.

By 1975, in a remarkable parallel with today, junior hospital doctors were resisting the introduction of a new contract by Barbara Castle (the Labour Government’s Social Services minister) which would have reduced their overall pay. Back then, however, their struggle was tangled up — at least by the BMA and the gutter press — with the consultants’ campaign to maintain their lucrative private practices at the same time as work for the NHS and the GPs who threatened mass resignation if they didn’t get a 30 per cent pay rise.

In the early years of the capitalist crisis the

working class did not imagine the scale and depth of the attacks that were to come. There was massive anger and willingness to fight but, as always, this was corralled by the unions into a section by section fight with no larger aim than for each group of workers to hold on to what they had. This was impossible. The capitalists were now ready to attack workers head on in their bid to raise profit rates. Sectional divisions and the low level of political consciousness within the working class allowed the bosses to get away with unprecedented economic restructuring which ushered in the era of globalisation and digital electronics. Over the last 40 years or so the shape of the working class has changed as the old heavy industries have gone. But far from the working class ‘disappearing’, new layers of professionals, like the junior doctors, have unambiguously joined the ranks of wage workers and are facing the same kind of attacks as the working class in general. Contrary to what sociologists and academics tell us, Karl Marx’s prediction of the decline of the middle class professional living on an income from fees for services rendered is now confirmed. Nowadays most ‘professionals’ depend on having to turn up regularly to a workplace to sell their labour power in return for a wage.

A New World Is Necessary ...

This is not the only one of Marx’s predictions that is being borne out. Today the capitalists themselves admit their system is facing a bigger economic crisis than ever before. Marx’s insight that capitalism’s drive to increase profits leads to ever-wider and deeper economic crisis where wages are driven down and unemployment rises has passed the reality test.

And Possible ...

Above all, Marx recognised that capitalism’s economic development in itself would not lead to a golden future for the majority of humanity. Yes, capital has created the material foundation for a world without the threat of poverty, war

and famine. What’s more the majority of people in the world belong to the global class of wage workers with no property interests of their own to get in the way of organising together to produce directly for human needs. But the capitalists are not going to let go without a fight. One of the most important insights of Marx today is the lesson he drew from the Paris Commune, way back in 1871, which is that the working class cannot simply take hold of the existing state machinery and reorganise society on a communist basis

Yet the social democratic illusions remain, if not in the possibility of communism through parliament, more often in the possibility of reorganising capitalism to the benefit of the working class. But no amount of momentum for Corbyn or any other left capitalist party can solve the capitalist crisis, much less perceptibly modify the attacks on the working class. The doctors have a lot of public support — none of us wish to be treated by dog-tired, demoralised doctors. But this needs to be turned into solidarity action, not just across the NHS, but from the wider working class. If nothing else, the last few decades have shown that the outlook for the future will only improve when each group of workers under attack recognises that their battle is part of wider class struggle for a new world.

The working class needs to have a vision and see the practical possibility of a new society: the only civilised and progressive response to the world capitalist crisis. The Communist Workers Organisation is a working class political organisation whose militants aim to bring a wider revolutionary perspective to struggle. We are ready to work with anyone who shares our vision and who is tired of having their efforts defused and wasted in reformist campaigns and single issue struggles. It’s noticeable that junior doctors have been involved in many of the Marxist study groups which have arisen since the financial crisis. As we offer the doctors our solidarity we are confident that a number amongst them already recognise that theirs is a fight which goes beyond ‘saving’ what’s left of the NHS.

Housing and Planning Bill: Slamming the Door on Tenants

It’s hard to tell how much the Housing and Planning Bill is the result of blind belief that the capitalist market will solve everything or downright self-interest and class spite. [196 MPs have declared income from rent.] Either way, it’ll destroy what remains of social housing and exacerbate the general housing crisis.

So what’s it going to do?

It will extend the right to buy to housing association tenants. Great if you can afford to buy, disastrous if you can’t. For many people, a housing association home is the only chance of decent affordable housing. Once that goes, most of the families on the waiting list won’t ever be properly housed. And as with council housing, once they’re gone, they’re gone. After decades of the right to buy, 40% of ex-council properties are now in private hands, and flats and houses are filled with tenants paying several times the original council rent to private landlords. The average monthly rent in London is £1,500 pcm with a 12.5% increase across the country over the past 12 months.

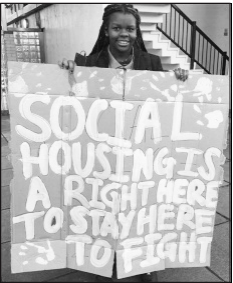
This has pushed the housing benefit bill to astronomical levels (£24.6 billion and rising) and has created a group of landlord millionaires. There’s always a lot of talk about benefit fraud, but this legal con is off the map, and we’re all paying for it.

It will introduce ‘pay to stay’ charges for tenants in social housing earning more than £30,000 per household a year or £40,000 in London. After criticism from the Local Government Association that this would force tens of thousands of families out of their homes and “represent a disincentive for people to take on extra work”, the government is now prepared to have a sliding scale so that tenants with an income not much higher than £30,000 will only face ‘modest’ rises in rent. The full increase will only apply to those with a household income of over £50,000. Even so, the intention is clear: to push up social housing rents to ‘market rates’. And if you don’t pay to stay the chances are you’ll be forced to move into the already crowded private sector, pushing rents up even further.

It will phase out secure tenancies, replacing them with lets of between 2-5 years. Social housing in Britain was founded

on the notion that decent housing be made available to workers at an affordable price and with a security of tenure, which would no longer leave families to the whims of private landlords. You get rid of secure tenancies, you get rid of the cornerstone of social housing and nobody has any security any more. Last year a government survey found that of the 5.1m households renting privately more than half had moved home in the past two years.

It will force councils to sell off valuable homes once they become empty to fund the sale of housing association homes to tenants. In London, ‘high value’ covers just about everywhere. Areas like Camden and Islington are now favourites to be ‘socially cleansed’ since 60% of Camden’s stock and 70% of Islington’s now qualifies as ‘high value’. It’s a complete double whammy; stock will be lost when HA tenants buy, and council stock will be lost to subsidise it. Anywhere between 80,000 and 200,000 homes could go, and again, tenants will be pushed into the private rented



sector. The Local Government Association estimates the cost to the Housing Benefit Bill will be an additional £210m a year.

It will grant planning permission for over 100 housing estates, condemned by the government as “magnets for poverty” to be demolished. This will lose us at least another 7,000 socially rented homes. The government boasts that ‘redevelopment’ will add 31,703 homes, but these will be either high rent properties or so-called starter homes (and those priced at £450,000 in London will be classed as affordable). These new houses will be magnets of money-making for a lucky few. The subsidy amounts to a tax-free windfall of up to £112,000 to those who’ll buy in London if they sell after 5 years. The scheme is being subsidised with £2.3bn in direct grants, part of an overall package worth almost £20bn. So there is state subsidy, but it’s certainly not going to help the 68,000 people living in temporary accommodation who are desperate to be re-housed, or the 1,240,000 people on local

authority waiting lists in England, or to tackle homelessness (where numbers are already up by 30% a year in England alone).

This is a shameful, bare-faced piece of anti-working class legislation aimed at dismantling social housing and subsidising those who need it least. It’s pushing workers out of London and ‘socially cleansing’ vast areas (teachers are only one group of workers already being priced out of London). But some are fighting back. Last year, protesters occupied empty flats on an estate in Elephant and Castle. They were evicted using riot police, but the Aylesbury Estate is typical of what’s happening in London; people are being forced out of their homes to make way for private developments. Groups like the Focus E15 Mothers, Save the Sutton Estate and Barnet Action Group are facing similar attacks with courage and determination. If this bill goes through, more and more tenants will discover that capitalism is unable to provide decent homes, and if tenants want to keep what they have, they’ll have to join together to fight for it, and take on a system that’s increasingly depriving them, and future generations, of any hope of a decent place to live.

What We Stand For:

The Communist Workers Organisation stands for a global society where production is for need and not profit (and is therefore sustainable), where the state, national frontiers and money have been abolished, where power is exercised through class-wide organisations like workers councils. This can only be created through the activity of millions of human beings. It will rid us of the capitalist offspring of poverty, hunger, oppression and war. We call it communism but it has nothing in common with Stalinist state capitalism of the old USSR.

In order to get there we are working to create a world proletarian political organisation: a ‘party’ for want of a better word. This is not a government in waiting. It does not rule but it will lead and guide the struggle for a new world. We by no means claim to be that party, only one of the elements which will come together in its formation. As the working class is faced with the consequences of a crumbling capitalist system it will have to unite and confront capitalist power. We aim to unite on a clearly agreed political programme to prepare the way for the majority of the world’s population the exploited of the earth, to overthrow the capitalist system and its bloody imperialist appetites.